



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE MUSICAL TIMES, And Singing Class Circular,

MAY 1st, 1856.

THE ORCHESTRAL CONDUCTOR.

By HECTOR BERLIOZ.*

Theory of his Art.

Music appears to be the most exacting of all the Arts, the most difficult to cultivate, and that of which the productions are most rarely presented in a condition which permits an appreciation of their real value, seeing clearly their physiognomy, or discovering their real meaning and their true character. Of all producing artists, the composer is almost the only one, in fact, who depends upon a multitude of intermediate agents between the public and himself; intermediate agents, either intelligent or stupid, devoted or hostile, active or inert, capable—from first to last—of contributing to the brilliancy of his work, or of disfiguring it, misrepresenting it, and even destroying it completely.

The singers have often been accused of forming the most dangerous of these intermediate agents; but, in my opinion, without justice. The most formidable, to my thinking, is the conductor of the orchestra. A bad singer can spoil only his own part; while an incapable or malevolent conductor ruins all. Happy, also, may that composer esteem himself, when the conductor into whose hands he has fallen, is not at once incapable and inimical. For nothing can resist the pernicious influence of this person. The most admirable orchestra is then paralysed; the most excellent singers are perplexed and rendered dull; there is no longer any vigour or unity; under such direction, the noblest boldnesses of the author appear extravagances, enthusiasm beholds its soaring flight checked, inspiration is violently brought down to earth, the angel's wings are fallen, the man of genius passes for a madman or an idiot, the divine statue is precipitated from its pedestal and dragged in the mud. And, what is worse, the public, and even those auditors endowed with the highest musical intelligence, are reduced to an impossibility (if a new work be in question, which they are hearing for the first time) of recognizing the ravages perpetrated by the orchestral conductor, of discovering the follies, faults, and crimes he commits. If they clearly perceive certain defects of execution, it is not him, but his victims, who are in such cases made responsible. If he have caused the chorus-singers to fail in taking up a point in a finale, if he have allowed a discordant wavering to take place between the choir and the orchestra, or between the two extreme sides of the instrumental body, if he have absurdly hurried a movement, if he have allowed it to linger unduly, if he have interrupted a

singer before the end of a phrase, they exclaim:—"The singers are detestable! The orchestra has no firmness; the violins have disfigured the principal design; everybody has been wanting in vigour and animation; the tenor was quite out, he did not know his part,—the harmony is confused; the author is no accompanist; the voices are, &c., &c., &c."

It is hardly, except in listening to the great works already known and esteemed, that intelligent hearers can distinguish the true culprit, and allot to each his due share of blame; but the number of these is still so limited, that their judgment has little weight: and the bad conductor,—in presence of the same public who would pitilessly hiss a *vocal accident* of a good singer,—reigns, with all the calm of a bad conscience, in his baseness and inefficiency. Fortunately, I here attack an exception; for the malevolent orchestral conductor—whether capable or not—is very rare.

The orchestral conductor full of good-will, but incapable, is, on the contrary, very common. Without speaking of the innumerable mediocrities, directing artists, who, frequently, are greatly their superiors, an author, for example, can scarcely be accused of conspiring against his own works; and yet, how many are there, who, fancying they are able to conduct, innocently injure their best scores.

Beethoven, it is said, more than once ruined the performance of his symphonies; which he would conduct, even at the time when his deafness had become almost complete. The musicians, that they might keep together, agreed at length to follow the slight indications of time which the concert-meister (first violin-leader) gave them; and not to attend to Beethoven's conducting-stick. Moreover, it should be observed, that conducting a symphony, an overture, or any other composition whose movements remain continuous, vary little, and contain few nice gradations, is child's-play in comparison with conducting an opera, or the like work, where there are recitatives, airs, and numerous orchestral designs preceded by pauses of irregular length.

The example of Beethoven, which I have just cited, leads me at once to say that if the direction of an orchestra appear to me very difficult for a blind man, it is indisputably impossible for a deaf one; whatever may have been his technical talent, before losing his sense of hearing.

The orchestral conductor should *see* and *hear*; he should be *active* and *vigorous*, should know the *composition*, the *nature* and *compass* of the instruments, should be able to *read* the score, and possess,—besides the especial talent of which we are going to endeavour to explain the constituent qualities,—other almost indefinable gifts, without which an invisible link cannot establish itself between him and those he directs; the faculty of transmitting to them his feeling is denied him, and thence, power, empire, and guiding influence completely fail him. It is then no longer a conductor, a director, but a simple beater of the time,—supposing he knows how to beat it, and divide it, regularly.

They should feel that he feels, comprehends, and is moved; then his feeling, his emotion communicate themselves to those whom he directs, his inward fire

* *A Treatise upon Modern Instrumentation and Orchestration; containing an Exact Table of the Compass, a Detail of the Mechanism, and a Study of the Quality of Tone, and Expressive Character of Various Instruments; accompanied by Numerous Examples in Score, from the Works of the Greatest Masters, and from some Unpublished Works of the Author. New Edition, revised, corrected, augmented by several additional (copyright) chapters on Newly-Invented Instruments, and on the whole Art of the Orchestral Conductor. By Hector Berlioz. Op. 10. Translated from the French by Mary Cowden Clarke. Published in Novello's Library for the diffusion of Musical Knowledge. Theoretical Series, No. VII. To be ready on May 15. Price 12s., bound*

warms them, his electric glow electrifies them, his force of impulse excites them; he throws around him the vital irradiations of Musical Art. If he be inert and frozen, on the contrary, he paralyses all about him, like those floating masses of the polar seas, the approach of which is perceived from the sudden cooling of the atmosphere.

His task is a complicated one. He has not only to conduct, in the spirit of the author's intentions, a work with which the performers have already become acquainted, but he has also to give them this acquaintance, when a work is in question that is new to them. He has to criticise the errors and defects of each, during the rehearsals, and to organise the resources at his disposal in such a way as to derive the best use he can of them, with the utmost promptitude. For, in the majority of European cities now-a-days, Musical Artizanship is so ill distributed, performers so ill paid, and the necessity of study so little understood, that *economy of time* should be reckoned among the most imperative requisites of the orchestral conductor's art.

Let us now examine what forms the mechanical part of this art.

The talent of *beater of the time*, without demanding very high musical attainments, is nevertheless sufficiently difficult to obtain; and very few persons really possess it. The signs that the conductor should make,—although generally very simple—nevertheless become complicated under certain circumstances, by the division and even the subdivision of the time of the bar.

The conductor, above all, is bound to possess a clear idea of the principal points and character of the work of which he is about to superintend the performance or study; in order that he may, without hesitation or mistake, at once determine the time of each movement desired by the composer. If he have not had the opportunity of receiving his instructions directly from this latter, or if the *times* have not been transmitted to him by tradition, he must have recourse to the indications of the metronome, and study them well; the majority of composers having now a-days the precaution to write them at the head and in the course of their pieces. I do not mean by this to say that it is necessary to imitate the mathematical regularity of the metronome; all music so performed would become of freezing stiffness, and I even doubt whether it would be possible to observe so flat a uniformity during a certain number of bars. But the metronome is none the less excellent to consult, in order to know the original time, and its chief alterations.

If the conductor possess neither the author's instructions, tradition, nor metronome indications,—which frequently happens in the ancient master-pieces, written at a period when the metronome was not invented,—he has no other guide than the vague terms employed to designate the time to be taken, and his own instinct; his feeling—more or less distinguishing, more or less just—of the author's style. We are compelled to admit, that these guides are too often insufficient and delusive. Of this we have

proof, in seeing how old operas are given in towns where the traditional mode of performance no longer exists. In ten different kinds of time, there will always be at least four taken wrongly. I once heard a chorus of *Iphigenia in Tauride* performed in a German theatre *allegro assai, two in the bar*, instead of *allegro non troppo, four in the bar*; that is to say, exactly twice too fast. Examples might be multiplied of such disasters, occasioned either by the ignorance or the carelessness of conductors of orchestras; or else by the real difficulty which exists for even the best-gifted and most careful men, to discover the precise meaning of the Italian terms used as indications of the time to be taken. Of course no one can be at a loss to distinguish a Largo from a Presto. If the Presto be two in a bar, a tolerably sagacious conductor, from inspection of the passages and melodical designs contained in the piece, will be able to trace the degree of quickness intended by the author. But if the Largo be four in a bar, of simple melodical structure, and containing but few notes in each bar, what means would the hapless conductor have of discovering the true time? And in how many ways might he not be deceived? The different degrees of slowness that might be assigned to the performance of such a Largo are very numerous; the individual feeling of the orchestral conductor must thence become the sole authority; and after all, it is the author's feeling, and not his, which is in question. Composers therefore ought not to neglect placing metronome indications in their works; and orchestral conductors are bound to study them closely. The neglect of this study on the part of the latter, is an act of dishonesty.

I will now suppose the conductor to be perfectly well acquainted with the times of the different movements in the work of which he is about to conduct the performance or rehearsals; he wishes to impart to the musicians acting under his orders, the rhythmical feeling within him, to decide the duration of each bar, and to cause the uniform observance of this duration by all the performers. Now, this precision and this uniformity can only be established in the more or less numerous assemblage of band and chorus, by means of certain signs made by their conductor.

These signs indicate the principal divisions, the accents of the bar, and, in many cases, the subdivisions, and the half-accents. I need hardly here explain what is meant by the 'accents' (accented and unaccented parts of a bar); I am pre-supposing that I address musicians.

The orchestral conductor generally uses a small light stick, of about a foot in length, and rather whitish than of a dark colour (it is seen better), which he holds in his right hand, to make clearly distinct his mode of marking the commencement, the interior division, and the close of each bar. The bow, employed by some violinist-conductors (leaders), is less suitable than the stick. It is somewhat flexible; this want of rigidity, and the slight resistance it also offers to the air, on account of its appendage of hair, render its indications less precise.

The simplest of all times,—two in a bar,—is likewise beaten simply.

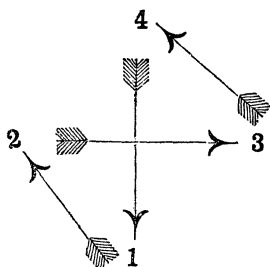
The arm and the stick of the conductor being raised, so that his hand is on a level with his head, he marks the first beat, by dropping the point of his stick perpendicularly from up to down (by the bending of his wrist, as much as possible; and not by lowering the whole arm), and the second beat by raising perpendicularly the stick by a contrary gesture.

The time—one in a bar—being in reality, and particularly for the conductor, but the time of two in a bar extremely rapid, should be beaten like the preceding. As the conductor is obliged to raise the point of his stick, after having lowered it, moreover necessarily divides this into two portions.

In the time—four in a bar—the first gesture, from up to down, is universally adopted for marking the first accented part, the commencement of the bar.

The second movement made by the conducting-

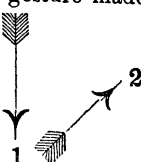
stick, from right to left, rising, indicates the second beat (first unaccented part). A third, transversely, from left to right, indicates the third beat (second accented part); and a fourth, obliquely, from down to up, indicates the fourth beat (second unaccented part). The combination of these four gestures may be figured thus:—



It is of importance that the conductor, in delivering thus his different directions, should not move his arm much; and consequently, not allow his stick to pass over much space; for each of these gestures should operate nearly in-

stantaneously; or at least, take but so slight a movement as to be imperceptible. If this movement become perceptible, on the contrary, multiplied by the number of times that this gesture is repeated, it ends by throwing the conductor behindhand in the time he is beating, and by giving to his conducting a tardiness that proves injurious. This defect, moreover, has the result of needlessly fatiguing the conductor, and of producing exaggerated evolutions, verging on the ridiculous, which attract the spectators' attention, and become very disagreeable to witness.

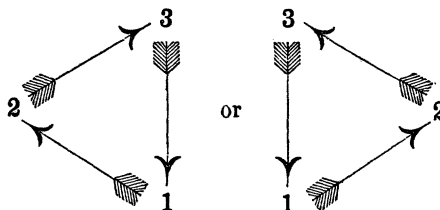
In the time, three in a bar, the first gesture made from up to down, is likewise universally adopted, for marking the first beat; but there are two ways of marking the second. The majority of orchestral conductors indicate it by a gesture from left to right; thus:—



Some German Kapel-meisters do the contrary; and carry the stick from right to left; thus:—

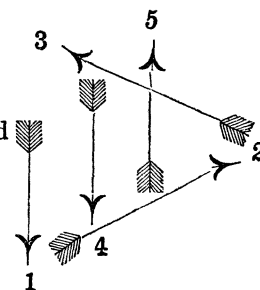
This way has the disadvantage,—when the conductor turns his back to the orchestra, as takes place in theatres,—of permitting only a small number of musicians to perceive the very important indication of the second beat; the body of the conductor then hiding the movement of his arm. The other method of proceeding is preferable; since the conductor stretches his arm *outwards*, withdrawing it from his chest; and his stick, which he takes care to raise slightly above the level of his shoulder, remains perfectly visible to all eyes. When the conductor faces the players, it is immaterial whether he mark the second beat to the right, or to the left.

However that may be, the third beat of the time, three in a bar, is always marked like the last of the time, four in a bar; by an oblique movement upwards.

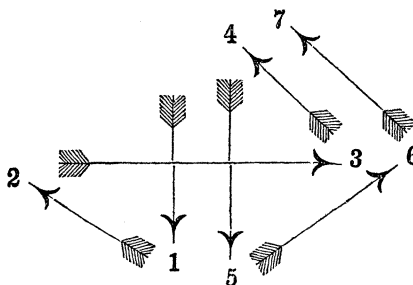


The times,—five and seven in a bar,—would be more comprehensible for the performers, if, instead of indicating them by a particular series of gestures, they were treated as though the one were composed of three and two in a bar, and the other composed of four and three.

Then, these times would be beaten thus:—



Example of seven in a bar:—



These different times, in order to be divided in this way, are assumed to belong to movements of moderate measure. It would not hold good, if their measure were either very quick or very slow.

The time, two in a bar, I have already signified, cannot be beaten otherwise than as we have before seen—whatever its degree of rapidity. But if, as an exception, it should be very slow, the conductor ought to subdivide it.

A time, four in a bar, very rapid, on the contrary, should be beaten two in a bar; the four accustomed gestures of a moderate movement becoming then so hurried, as to present nothing decided to the eye, and serving only to confuse the performer instead of giving him confidence. Moreover,—and this is of much more consequence,—the conductor, by making uselessly these four gestures in a quick movement, renders the pace of the rhythm awkward, and loses the freedom of gesture which a simple division of the time into its half, would leave him.

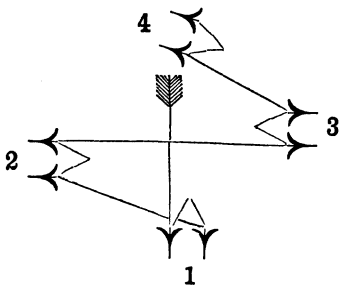
Generally speaking, composers are wrong to write, in such a case, the indication of the time as four in a bar. When the movement is very brisk, they should never write any other than the sign **C**, and not that of **C**, which might lead the conductor into error.

It is exactly the same for the time, three in a bar, fast $\frac{3}{4}$, or $\frac{3}{8}$. Then, the gesture of the second beat must be omitted; and, by remaining the period of a beat longer on the first, only raise the stick at the third.

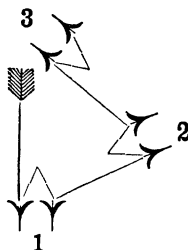
It would be absurd to attempt to beat the three in a bar of one of Beethoven's scherzos.

The contrary is the case for these two times, as for that of two in a bar. If the movement be very slow, each time must be divided; and consequently eight gestures must be made for the time, four in a bar, and six for the time, three in a bar, repeating (and shortening) each of the principal gestures we have before instanced.

Example of four in a bar, very slow:



Example of three in a bar, very slow:



The arm should remain wholly unaiding to the little supplementary gesture, instanced for the subdivision of the bar; merely the wrist causing the stick to move.

(To be continued.)

MUSIC

AMONG THE POETS AND POETICAL WRITERS.

By MARY COWDEN CLARKE.

(Continued from page 214.)

"Sweet music has been heard
In many places;—some has been upstirr'd
From out its crystal dwelling in a lake,
By a swan's ebon bill; from a thick brake,
Nested and quiet in a valley mild,
Bubbles a pipe; fine sounds are floating wild
About the earth."—*Keats*.

American farm sounds, out-door and in-door, are chronicled in the following passages:—

"Patiently stood the cows meanwhile, and yielded their udders

Unto the milkmaid's hand; whilst loud and in regular cadence

Into the sounding pail the foaming streamlets descended. Lowing of cattle and peals of laughter were heard in the farm-yard,

Echoed back by the barns. Anon they sank into stillness; Heavily closed, with a creaking sound, the valves of the barn-doors,

Rattled the wooden bars, and all for a season was silent.

* * * * *
Fragments of song the old man sang, and carols of Christmas,

Such as at home, in the olden time, his fathers before him Sang to their Norman orchards and bright Burgundian vineyards.

Close at her father's side was the gentle Evangeline seated, Spinning flax for the loom, that stood in the corner behind her:

Silent awhile were its treadles, at rest was its diligent shuttle,

While the monotonous drone of the wheel, like the drone of a bagpipe,

Followed the old man's song, and united the fragments together.

As in a church, when the chant of the choir at intervals ceases,

Footfalls are heard in the aisles, or words of the priest at the altar,

So, in each pause of the song, with measured motion, the clock clicked."—*Longfellow*.

* * * * *
"The unnumber'd sounds that evening store;
The songs of birds—the whisp'ring of the leaves—
The voice of waters—the great bell that heaves
With solemn sound,—and thousand others more,
That distance of recognizance bereaves,
Make pleasing music, and not wild uproar."—*Keats*.

* * * * *
"It is the hour when from the boughs
The nightingale's high note is heard;
It is the hour when lovers' vows
Seem sweet in every whisper'd word;
And gentle winds, and waters near,
Make music to the lonely ear."—*Byron*.

* * * * *
"I* have sent through the wood-paths a gentle sigh,
And call'd out each voice of the deep-blue sky,
From the night-bird's lay through the starry-time,
In the groves of the soft Hesperian clime,
To the swan's wild note by the Iceland lakes,
When the dark fir-bough into verdure breaks."

Mrs. Hemans.

(Continued on page 235.)

* The Spring.